

Leah Southern, Alumna and Staff

Why have you decided to join the Purple Wave?

I've never been very good at running and, until recently, I haven't been very fit but I do like a challenge. Over the last six months fitness has become increasingly important to me and seeing my friends and colleagues getting involved with the Purple Wave has encouraged me to join them. Knowing that I'll have that support network in the run up and on the day makes all the difference, if anything, I don't want to miss out on this opportunity. I know people who took part in this last year who, by their own admission, are not very fit and active and they still had a great time and have signed up to do it again.

What did you have to overcome when deciding to run with us?

I have always hated running, it's never been my strong point; drop me in a pool and my endurance is there but tarmac and trainers strike me with dread. I'd now call myself a regular at my local gym but I'm still yet to use the treadmill for anything other than a quick walk to warm up. I'm still not sure if I'll be very good at it, and that thought is a little worrying; what if I'm really bad? But I'll be so proud of myself when I finish that it will be worth the risk. I'm going to try and get some training in in the run up so that hopefully I can achieve a good time.

Are you raising money for an interesting or important cause?

I'm raising money for Undergraduate Access Scholarships at The University of Manchester with my colleagues. This is a very important cause to me; access to higher education is something that I feel very strongly about as it has helped me to change the direction of my life. I became a mother at seventeen while studying towards my A-levels, trying to complete my A-levels with a baby was extremely difficult, so I left sixth form and decided to take the Access to Higher Education route just after my son's first birthday. I had very little support from family who thought it was best for me to give up on education but I was determined to go to university. Studying at The University of Manchester was a bit of a dream, even my tutors at college told me to aim a little lower but I'm so pleased I ignored them. Manchester believed in me when no one else did and that meant a lot to me. I had a great time at University, it was extremely tough, but it prepared me well for life after graduation. The thing that makes me most proud about being a Manchester alumna is how inclusive the university is, it has the largest proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in comparison to the other Russell Group Universities, which is something I'm keen to support.



How will it feel to run with hundreds of students and staff from the University?

I wouldn't be doing it without them! Being part of such a big supportive group is definitely very encouraging. I'm really looking forward to the atmosphere and meeting other people who will be joining the Purple Wave. I didn't go last year and there was so much buzz about it, I'm excited that this year I'll be able to be involved in this.

What do you want to achieve?

I want to say, I just want to get to the finish line but I know I can't fight my competitive urge to perform really well. I would like to complete the 10K in under an hour but, as I'm not much of a runner, I think I'm going to have to train really hard for this!

How important is running and physical activity to you and why?

It's massively important to me now but it hasn't always been. I took part in a step challenge which was organised by my Green Impact team at the University. I found it really hard to hide my competitiveness; I was in the gym, on the treadmill trying to get the best step count I could manage. I have been a member of my gym for quite a while and the step count challenge got me back in there after months of avoiding it. I decided to try a few of the classes and now I'm totally hooked. I'm at the gym at least five days a week and I'm now training with a PT.